

# Syntactic analysis of some of the verbal complements in Arabic and the importance of that for the translation Between Arabic and English

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## Abstract:

Two main points are discussed in this paper: first, syntactic analysis of some of the verb complements in Arabic in the government and Binding framework, henceforth GB. These include the following: the object **المفعول به**, the absolute object **المفعول المطلق**, the causative object **المفعول لأجله**, the comitative object **المفعول معه**, the locative object (adverb of time) and the temporal object (adverb of time) **المفعول فيه**. Second how such structures might be translated from Arabic into English. Do they keep their syntactic categories as in Arabic or should they take some different syntactic forms but with the same meaning.

## 1. Theoretical framework

The Government and Binding framework we are adopting is that of Chomsky's 1981 **Lectures on Government and Binding**, henceforth LGB and Bouchard's 1984 **On the Content of Empty Categories**. The reader is expected to have a fair knowledge of the general ideas and framework of this approach.

There are some vital points which are vital to our argument which we would like to stress:

- (1) (i) case assignment takes place at S-structure only:

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“ We assume that case-assignment takes place at S-structure only”(LGB:94)

(ii) Adjacency is a condition for case assignment at the syntactic level only.

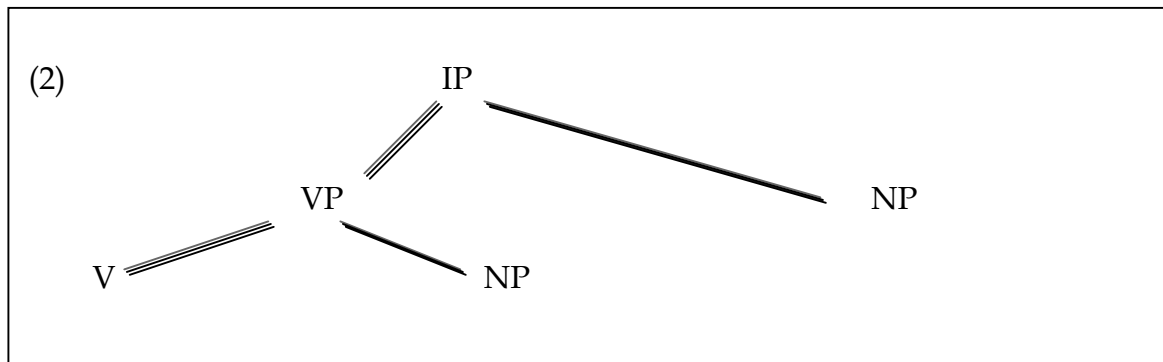
“ We assume that case-marking takes place at S-structure ... therefore, the notion of adjacency is that of S-structure “ (LGB:94)

(iii) The basic underlying word-order in Arabic is verb-object-subject i.e VOS. For a comprehensive syntactic analysis on this issue, see Homeidi,M. 1991, 1997a, and 1997b.

(iv) Infl is not a syntactic node but attached to V in the lexicon: “ Another possibility is to assume that infl is not a syntactic node but it is attached to V in the lexicon, following an axiom of lexical phonology that all affixation is done in the lexicon( cf. Kiparsky,1982, Liebero,1980, Psetsky, 1979)”

## 2. The verbal Complement in Modern Standard Arabic(MSA)

Since we assume that the basic word order in Arabic is VOS, then the underlying basic tree structure in transitive structures is as follows:



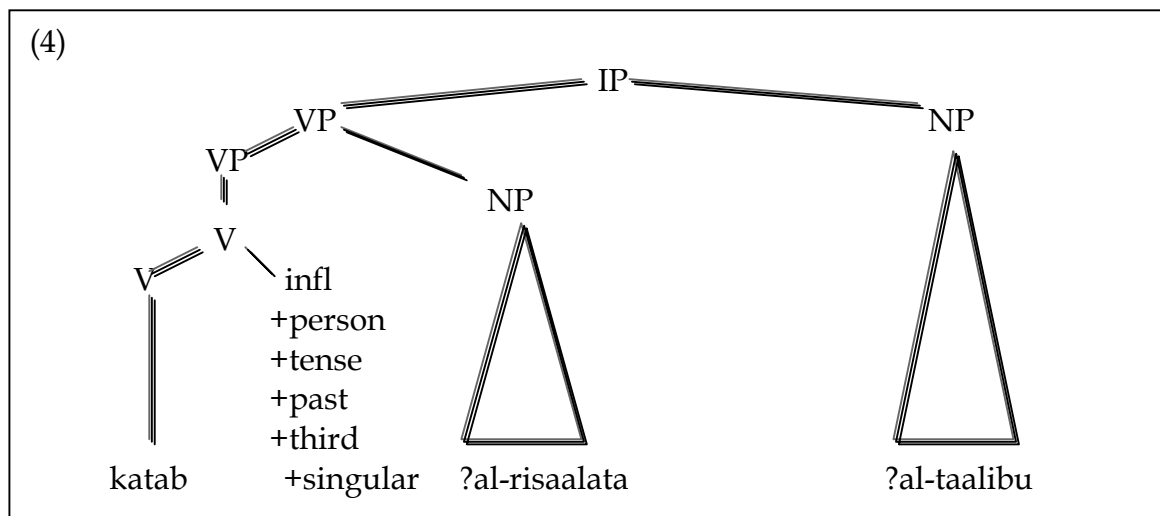
The verb governs its object and assigns it an accusative case and theta role as a patient, whereas the NP subject receives a nominative case and theta role as an agent because it is governed by INFL+VP after percolation of infl to VP in the syntax. The verb in Arabic gets many complements. We will restrict our discussion to five types of complements as representatives of the verb complement in Arabic namely: the object **المفعول به**, the absolute object **المفعول المطلق**, the causative object **المفعول لأجله**, the comitative object **المفعول معه**, the locative object (adverb of place), and temporal object(adverb of time) **المفعول فيه**

## 2.1 The object (المفعول به)

Arabic, as English or any other language, has transitive structures with one object, two objects, or even three objects. Let us have some examples.

- (3) katab-a    ?al-taalib-u    ?al-risaalat-a  
 read-past   the student-nom   the letter-acc  
 the student wrote the letter.

In fact there is nothing that deserves special argument; it suffices to say that the verb governs its object and assigns it an accusative case and theta role as a patient. The tree structure is as follows:



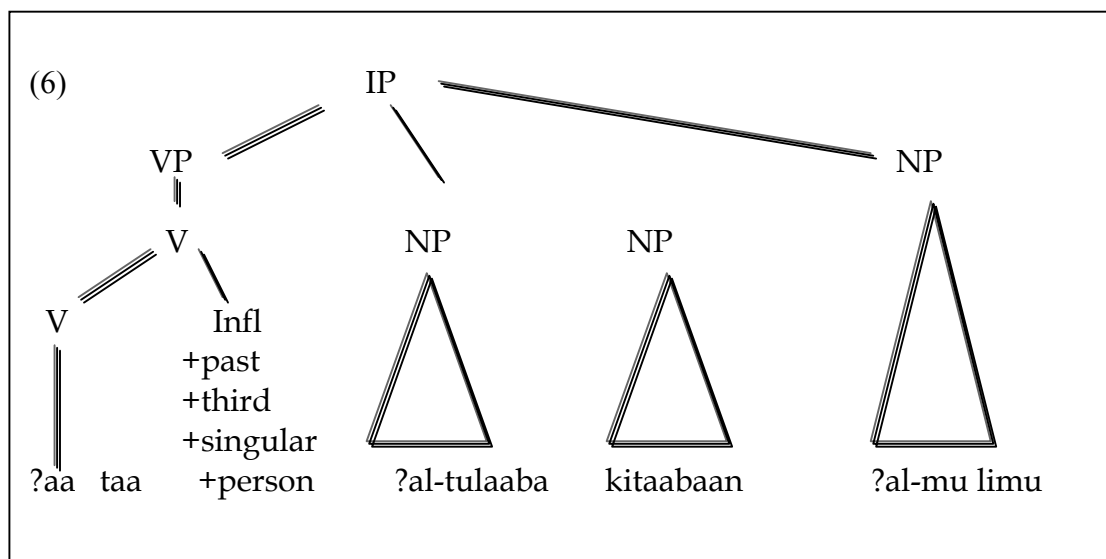
The translation of this type of sentences into English is straightforward. The translator has to take the NP subject into initial position, and then we have "The student wrote the letter". However, the translator should be aware of the tense-marker on the verb since the verb in Arabic expresses the tense by the last vowel in the transliteration form , /a/ for past, /u/ for present, and the particles sa and sawfa for the future. However, Arabic has a class of verbs that requires two objects.

## 2.2. Verbs that require two objects

This class of verbs include some verbs e.g:

- (5) ?aa taa      ?al-mu lim-u      ?al- tulaab-a      kitaabaa-n  
       give-past    the teacher-nom    the students-acc    a book-acc  
       the teacher gave the students a book

Here, the syntactic structure is also straightforward:



Two objects are found in this structure. If we adhere to the principle that the verb assigns just one accusative case to the NP that it m-commands , then the indirect object will receive an inherit accusative case assigned by the syntactic properties of the verb itself according to the projection principle.

However, the translation into English is straightforward. The translator has to start with the NP subject , then we get:

(7) The teacher gave the student a book.

Notice (5) can be translated into English as follows:

(8) The teacher gave a book to the boy

in which case the indirect object takes the form of a prepositional phrase .

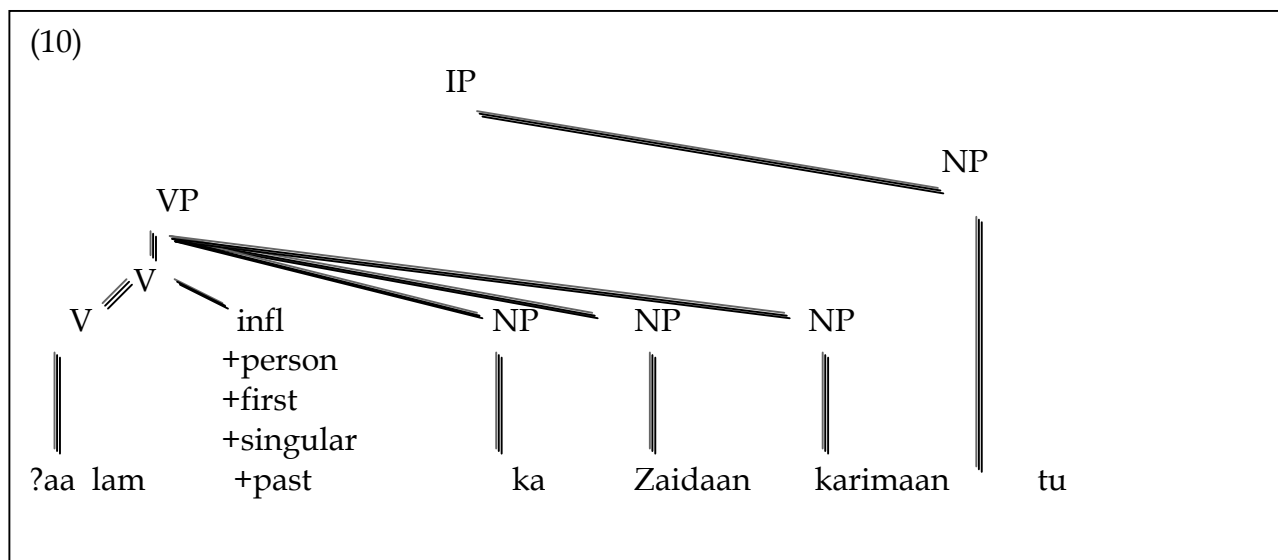
### 2.3 Verbs that require three objects

This class of verbs include verbs such as: *?aa lama* and *?aaraa*.

(9) *?aa lam-tu -ka Zaid-aan karimaa-n*  
 tell-past- I-nom you-acc Zaid-acc karima-acc

I told you that Zaid is generous ( *?al-raajihii :214* )

The tree structure of (9) is as follows:



According to our syntactic framework only *ka* , the first NP to the right of the verb could receive an accusative structural case and theta role as a patient. We suggest that these structures should be marked (like those that require two objects) i.e the projection principle should guarantee this.

What is interesting , however, is the way these structures are translated into English. Only the first object is rendered as an object in English; the other two objects form an embedded clause in which the first object takes the role of subject and the other is subjective complement. The translator should be aware of this difference. This point could be the base of an argument which suggests that these objects are, in fact, not typical objects but some types of adjectives. However, this lies outside the scope of this paper. Another sentence with identical analysis is the following:

- (11) ?anbaa?a-tu      Zaid-aan      ?aabaa -hu      mariid-aan  
 tell- past- I-nom    Zaid-acc      father-acc his-obli      ill-acc  
 I told Zaid that his father is ill

The translation of this class of verbs raise a very interesting point (from a syntactic point of view) i.e. dose Arabic really have three objects structures or should they be analyzed differently ? What is explicit is that the three NPs that follow the verb are in the accusative which might suggest that they should be one type of an object or another! However their theta roles are far from being patient

### 3. The Absolute object (المفعول المطلق)

The Absolute object ,according to Arabic tradition, is defined semantically and syntactically as f:

“An accusative NP that takes the form of its *masdar* (participle) or its substitute; its used to emphasize the action of its governor ; its kind or number” ?al-raajihii: 227.

The governor of the absolute object is “the verb or its substitute i.e what can function as a verb” *ibid*.

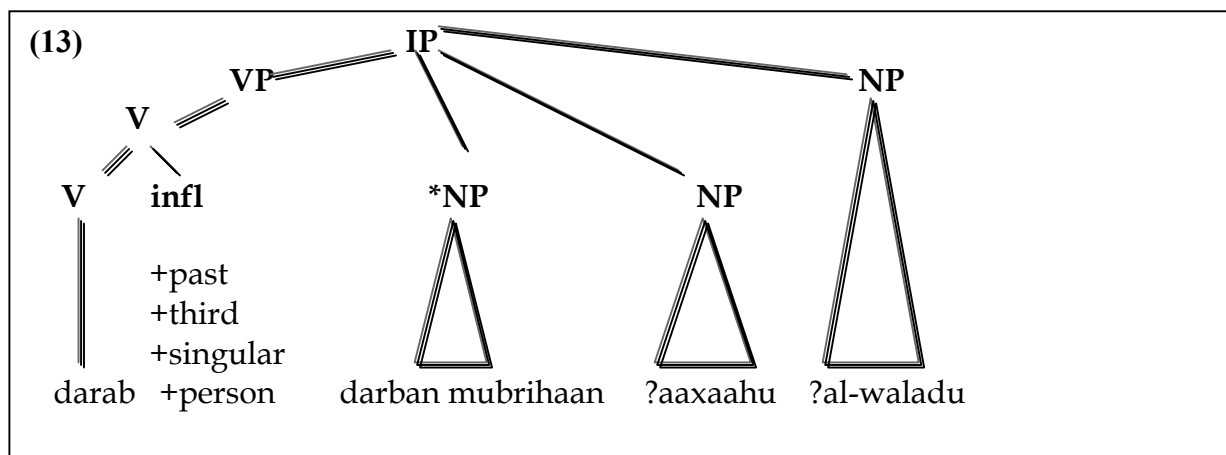
Let us have some typical examples , and then some slightly complicated ones:

(12) \*darab-a ?al-walad-u ?aaxaah-u darb-an mubarih-aan

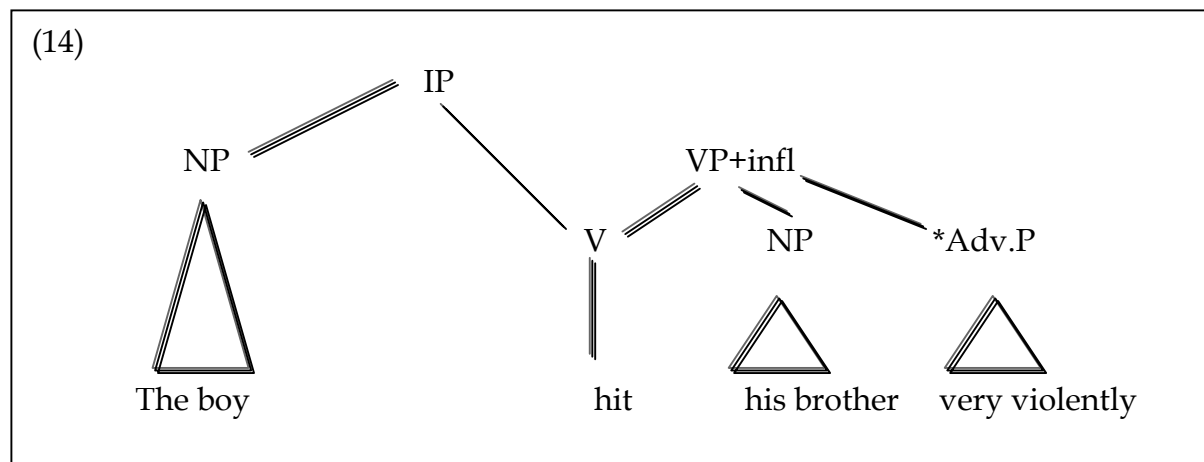
hit-past the boy -nom brother-acc-his-gen violently very-acc

the boy hit his brother very violently

The starred verb is the governor while the underlined phrases are the absolute object in Arabic and the English translation. We notice that the absolute object in Arabic has taken the form of an adverbial phrase In English. Let us draw the tree structure which should look like the following:



The starred \*NP is the NP that contains the absolute object. Let us draw the tree structure of the English translation and see the equivalent of the starred NP.



The starred phrase is the equivalent of the absolute object in Arabic, it is an adverbial phrase of manner. The translator should be aware of this especially if he is teaching these structures to his students.

Some more examples include the following:

- (15) \*qaraa?t-u      ?al-qisat-a      marratyyn-i  
 read-past I-nom    the story-acc    twice-obl  
 I read the story twice

The starred verb is the governor and the underlined phrases are the absolute object in Arabic and its equivalence in English.

Let us take a slightly more complicated examples syntactically representing what is known in Arabic as the active participle being the governor:

- (16) i?nna    \*?al-qaari?-a    kutub-a-hu    qiraa?at-an    mu maqat-an    sawfa    yanjah-u  
 that    reader-nom    books-acc-his-obl    reading-aa    thoroughly-acc    will    pass-nom  
 the exam-acc



the \*one who reads his books thoroughly will pass the exam

The active participle is the starred NP in Arabic whose equivalent is the starred italic forms in the English translation. Two points should be observed in the translation of (16) into English: (a) that the English translation should be a relative clause structure, and (b) that the underlined absolute object NP in Arabic is translated into an adverb of manner.

What is interesting in (16) is that the back translation of the English translation into Arabic is a relative clause structure:

(17) إن الذي يقرأ كتبه بتمعن/يعمق سوف ينجح

In (17) we find the same relative clause structure as in the English translation of (16); in addition, the absolute object NP has taken the form of a prepositional phrase functioning as an adverb of manner.

Another example in which اسم المفعول *active participle* is the governor of the absolute object is the following:

(18) haḏaa    ?al-rajul-u    \*muhtramu-n    ?ihtiraam-aan    shadiid-an bayyna qawmih-i  
 this-nom    the man-nom    is respected    highly/ greatly-acc    among his  
 people -obli

this man is greatly/highly respected among his people

We notice here that the NP absolute object is translated into an adverbial phrase of manner. A conclusion might be drawn as follows:

*Absolute objects in Arabic are translated into adverbial  
 phrases in English regardless of their governors*

The translator should be aware of this fact and should explain it to his students if he is a teacher of translation.

#### 4. The Object of result المفعول لأجله

Syntactically and semantically, Arabic tradition defines the **object of result** as follows:

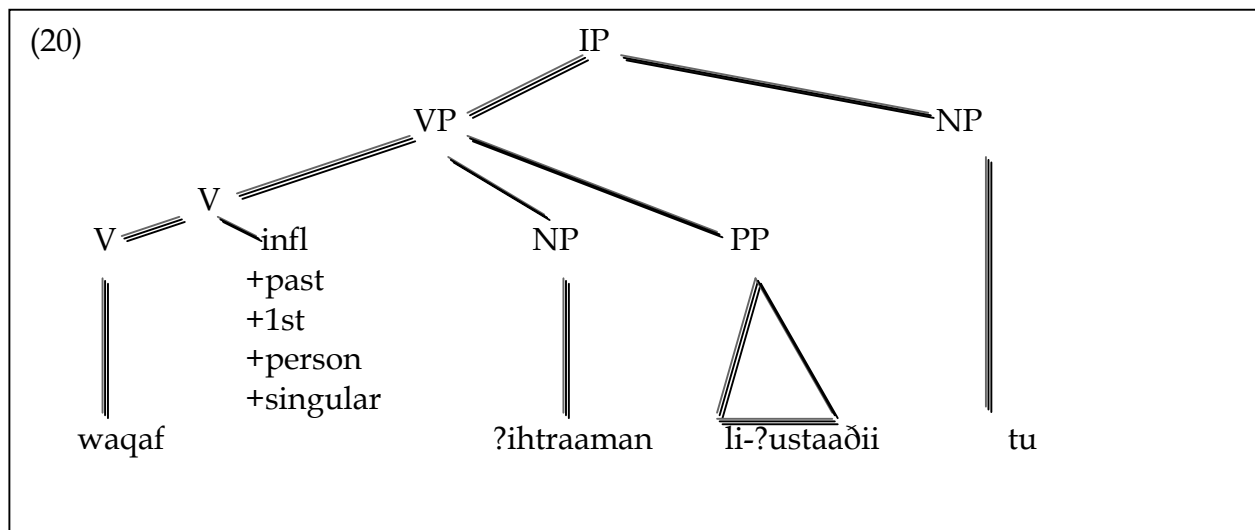
“It is an accusative NP masdar form ( participle form) used to clarify the cause of its governor which is usually the verb, though there are some other governors; and it should share with it the same time and subject”. ?al-raajihii:236

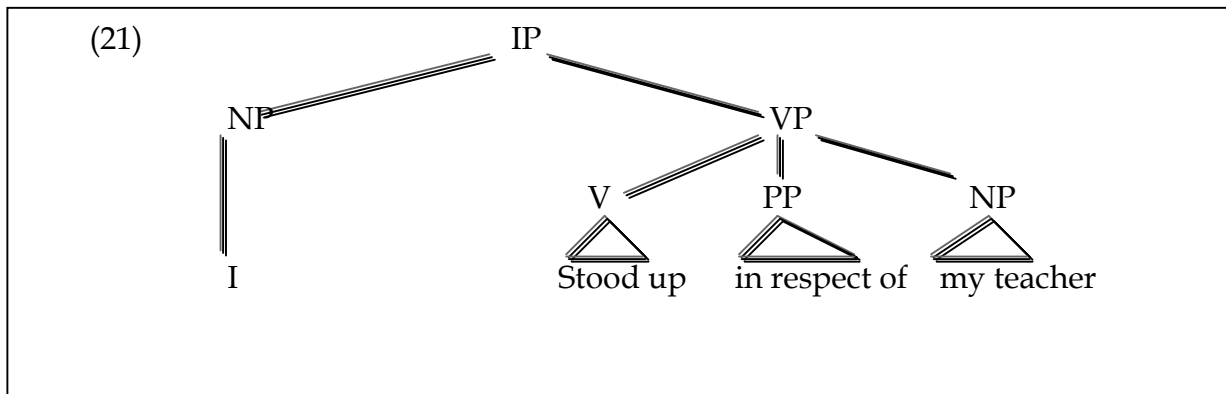
The governor of the object of result include the following:

(i) a verb as in:

- (19) \*waqaft-u      ?ihtiram-an      li-?ustaað-ii  
 stand-past-I-nom   in respect of   to-teacher- obli-my-obli  
 I stood up in respect of my teacher .

The governor is the starred verb. We notice that the NP expressing the object of result in Arabic has taken the form of prepositional phrase in the English translation. This is quite clear from the syntactic structure of both the Arabic sentence as in (20) and its translation as in (21) respectively:





This point should be taken into consideration when translating between two languages .

(ii) The masdar (active participle) form which is an NP that can be assigned the features [+V,+N] as in : the

- (22) \* luzum-u    ?al-bayyit-i    talab-a    ?al-raahat-i    darrurat-un    ba d-a    ?al- mal  
 staying -nom at home-obli    for rest-obli    necessity-nom after work-obli  
 staying at home for rest after work is a necessity

The starred NP is the governor whereas the underlined phrases are what expresses the object of result in both Arabic and English.

(ii) The masdar ( participle form) as in :

- (23) huwa    \*muhtaram-un    ?ikraam-an    li-?abii-hi  
 He-nom is respected    for the sake    of -father-obli- his-obli  
 He is respected for the sake of his father.

The starred NP is the governor, and the underlined NPs are what expresses the object of result in both languages.

There are some other governors of the object of result but all of them fall in the same analysis i.e. we have an NP that can be characterized as[ +V,+N] assigning an accusative case to a following NP that expresses what is called semantically in Arabic the *object of result*.

In conclusion of this section one can say that the accusative object of result in Arabic takes the form of a prepositional phrase in English or some other forms according to the necessities of translation.

## 5. The Comitative Object ( ?al-maf uul ma ahu)

(24) The comitative object is an **accusative NP** preceded by **wa/ and** denoting concomitance which itself is preceded by a **sentence** containing a **verb** or *its equivalent* .  
?al-raajihii:256.

The phrase in italic means an NP that is characterized[ +N,+V].

Some examples include the following:

(25) \*sirt-u                      wa                      ?al-shaati?-a  
walk-past-I-nom      and/along      the seafront-acc  
I walked along the seafront

The original governor of the comitative object is the **verb**(starred) through the **com wa/and**.    ?al-raajihii:256.

In (25) we have all the conditions expressed in (24) met : an **accusative NP** preceded by **wa/and** which itself is preceded a **sentence** containing the governor which is the **verb sirtu** (walked).

Some other examples in which the governor is not the verb include the following:

(i)      The active participle (?ismu ?al-faa l) such as:

(26) ?anaa \*saa?.ru-n              wa                      ?al-shaatii?-a  
I-nom walking-nom      and/along      the seafront-acc  
I am walking along the sea front

The starred NP is the governor whereas the underlined phrases express the comitative object.

(ii)      The participle (?ismu ?al-maf uul)

(27) Zaid-n \*muhtaram-n wa ?axaa-hu

Zaid-nom respected-nom and brother-acc-his-obli

Zaid is respected and his brother as well

The starred NP is the governor; the underlined phrases express the comitative object.

(iii) The Participle form (?al- masdar)

(28) \*Sayyr-u-ka wa ?al- shatii?-a fii ?al-sabaah-a mufiid-un

Walking-nom-your and/along the seafront-acc in the morning is useful

Your walking along the seafront in the morning is useful

The starred NP is the governor; the underlined phrases express the comitative object.

(iv) nomen actionis (?ismu ?al-fi li):

(29) \*ruuwaidi-ka wa ?al-mariid-a

take care-you and/with the patient

take care of the patient (literally, take care while you are with the patient, or take care of the patient while you are with him)

In conclusion to this section, we can say that the comitative object in Arabic takes the form of a prepositional phrase in English . The teacher of translation should be aware of this fact when teaching the translation of such structures.

## 6. The locative object and the Temporal object

(Adverbs of place and Time) ?al-maff uul fiihi المفعول فيه

The locative object and the temporal object are, in fact, the **adverbs** of **place** and **time** respectively. They are called objects in Arabic because they receive an accusative case from their governor which is normally the verb or a[+N,+V] lexical item. They express the time or the place or both in which an action has taken place.

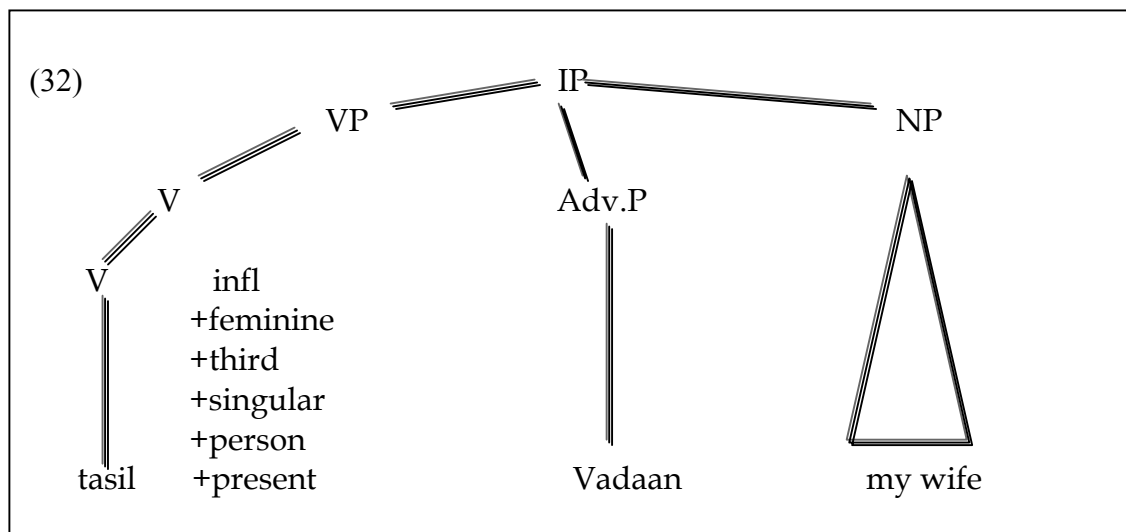
There is nothing that deserves special syntactic or semantic argument for this type of objects if we take the following points into consideration:

- (i) These objects are in the accusative case,
- (ii) they express time and place,
- (iii) their governor is mainly the verb.

A typical example is the following:

- (30) \*tasil-u      zawjatt-ii      Vad-aan  
 arrive-nom   wife-nom-   my-obli tomorrow-acc  
 my wife arrives tomorrow

The starred verb is the governor and the underlined phrase is the temporal object (adverb of time). The tree structure of (30) is as follows:



Other governors include the following:

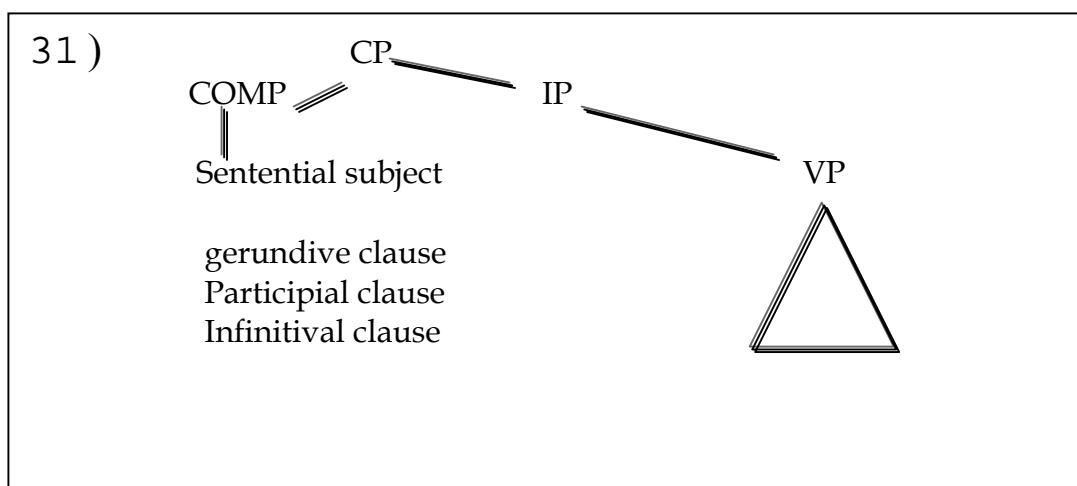
- (32) ?al-masdar ( the participle) as in :

\*ʔal- amal-u    laiyl-an    mut ib-un

the work-nom    night-acc    tiresome

working at night is tiresome

In fact we have a gerundive structure in the English translation. This could be very illuminating since it opens the possibility of analyzing the *masadar* forms in Arabic as gerundive structures. Accordingly, the basic tree structure of these structures in both languages could be as follows (regardless of the internal structure of the gerundive clause and the different word order in the two languages):



(32) The active participle (ʔsimu ʔal-faa l)

Ahmad        \*qaadim-un    /adaa-an

Ahmad-nonm    coming-nom    tomorrow

Ahmad is coming tomorrow

The starred phrase is the governor and the underlined phrases are the adverbs of time.

(33) The participle (ʔismu ʔal-maf uu):

?al-maktabat-u      \*maftuuhat-un    sabaah-an  
 the-library-nom      opened-nom      morning-acc  
 the library is opened in the morning

The starred NP is the governor, and the underlined phrases are the adverbs of time.

(35) siiVatu ?al-mubalaVti (form of exaggeration)

\*?al-shujaa -u    shujaa -un    tawaal-a    haayat-i-hi  
 the courageous    courageous    all-acc    life-obli-his-obli  
 the courageous is courageous all his life

The starred NP is the governor while the underlined phrases are the adverbs of time in this example

A brief conclusion to this section is in order now:

- (36) (i) Structures containing objects(adverbs) of place and time are translated into an equivalent adverbial clauses in English
- (ii) These adverbs receive an accusative case in Arabic so the translator should be aware of this when translating from English into Arabic
- (iii) The governor of these structures in Arabic is mainly the verb or a [+N,+V] lexical item. This last feature characterizes the gerund, the participle in English and the different forms of ?al-masdar in Arabic.

## 7. Conclusion

The previous analysis has clarified many points which can be formulated as follows:

(37)

- (i) With the exception of the direct object, other objects in Arabic including the absolute object, the causative object and the comitative object should be translated as adverbial phrases.



- (ii) The complement of the verbs that require three objects should be translated as an object followed by a complement clause in which the subject is the second object in the Arabic sentence.
- (iii) All types of governors of the different types of objects in the Arabic sentence ,with the exception of the verb, should be characterized as [+N,+V].
- (iv) The sentences in which the governor is one type of the *masdar* forms in Arabic can be analyzed syntactically as gerundive, participle or even infinitives clauses in subject position.
- (v) It seems that concepts such as government and case play an important role in the syntax of Arabic. This is quite clear from the case assignment that should be carried by the different types of governors on the different types of phrases. All types of adverbial phrases including those of time and place should be governed and assigned an accusative case, and this is the reason why they are called objects rather than adverbs in the Arabic syntactic tradition.
- (vi) The *wa*/and (literally) which precedes the object of cause is translated into different prepositions in English .

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